ARTISTIC TOOLS VOL. TWO

by Kevin Kubota

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kubota IMAGETOOLS

empowering photographers

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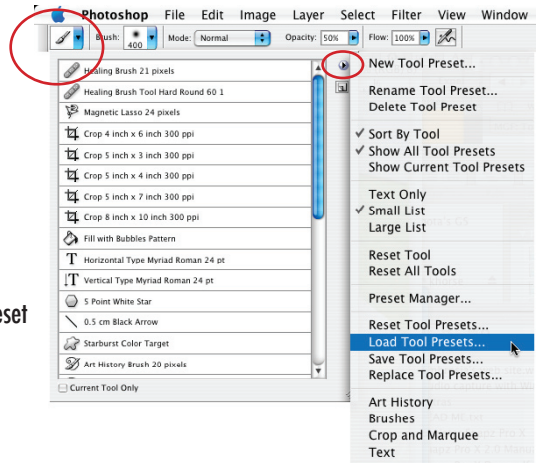
"Efficiency is intelligent laziness."
–David Dunham

Yes, we want to make you intelligently lazy. Why spend hours trying to achieve the beautiful looks you love, do them in seconds! We've compiled a collection of our favorite actions - tools that we use everyday in our busy studio - for you to easily apply to your own work.

To use these actions, you need to have Photoshop® 7 or higher. Photoshop CS2 or newer is highly recommended as the new features are well worth it. A few of our actions need CS2 or newer to work, as they use some of the unique features in the newer versions. Actions are recorded sequences of events within Photoshop®. Some actions are easy to record, some require complex steps, troubleshooting, and planning. All should save you countless hours of time over the long haul - giving you more time for the really fun stuff.

This brief manual will cover some basic info on using actions, things to look out for, and tips for using our actions on your images.

Install Script, Presets, and Borders



1) Custom brush presets that are used by the actions.
2) A javascript for use with the sloppy border proofing action.
3) 2 starter sloppy border files in .PSD format that are used by the actions.

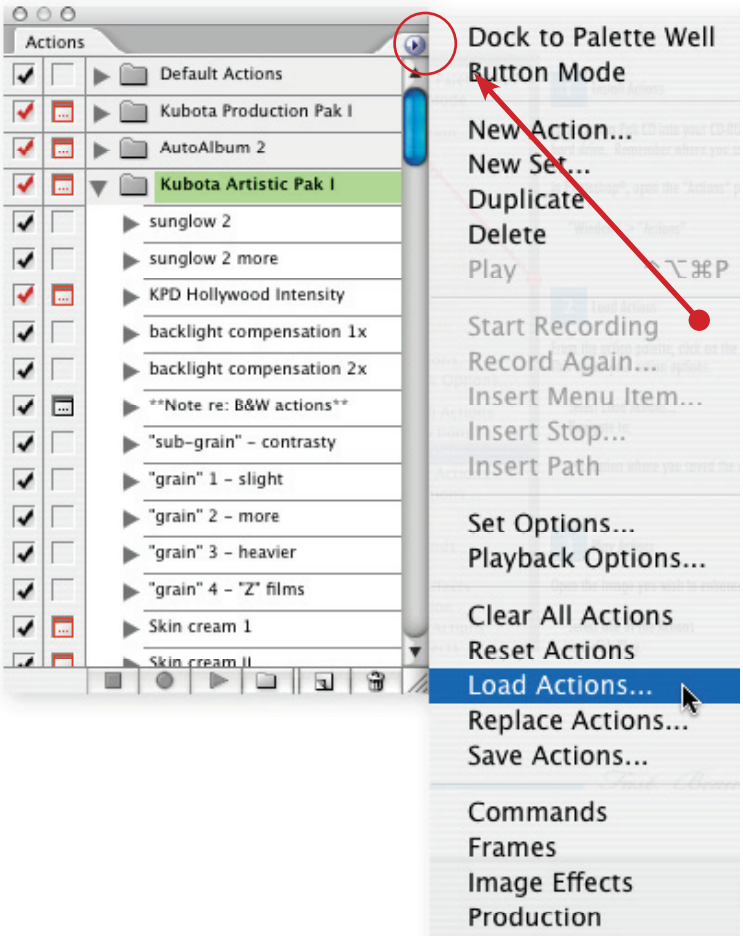
You must install these items before using the actions.

To install the Custom Brush presets.
1) Open Photoshop
2) Click on the Tool Preset icon, and the small arrow button to choose: Load tool preset
3) Select the tool preset included on the CD or download file.

To install the javascript in CS or newer:
1) Copy the file on the cd called, "rotate tall to wide.jsx"
2) Find your Photoshop program folder on your computer, then navigate to: Photoshop/presets/scripts
3) Paste the rotate tall to wide.jsx file in there.
4) Restart Photoshop if it is currently running.

To install the javascript in PS7:
1) Copy the file on the cd called, "rotate tall to wide.jsx"
2) Find your Photoshop program folder on your computer, then navigate to: Photoshop/presets/scripts
3) Paste the rotate tall to wide.jsx file in there.
4) Open the "PS 7 only" folder on the disk.
5) Install the Photoshop scripting plugin for your system, following the instructions in the installers. (note: this plugin does not need to be installed if you previously installed it for other reasons.)
4) Restart Photoshop if it is currently running.

To install the sloppy border files:
1) Simply copy the 2 sloppy border .PSD files and put them on your computer anywhere you want.
2) Remember where you put it. You'll be asked to find it later!



Install Action Pak

Load Actions

From the action palette, click on the little triangle at the top right corner. This opens your action options.

Select Load Actions...
Navigate to:

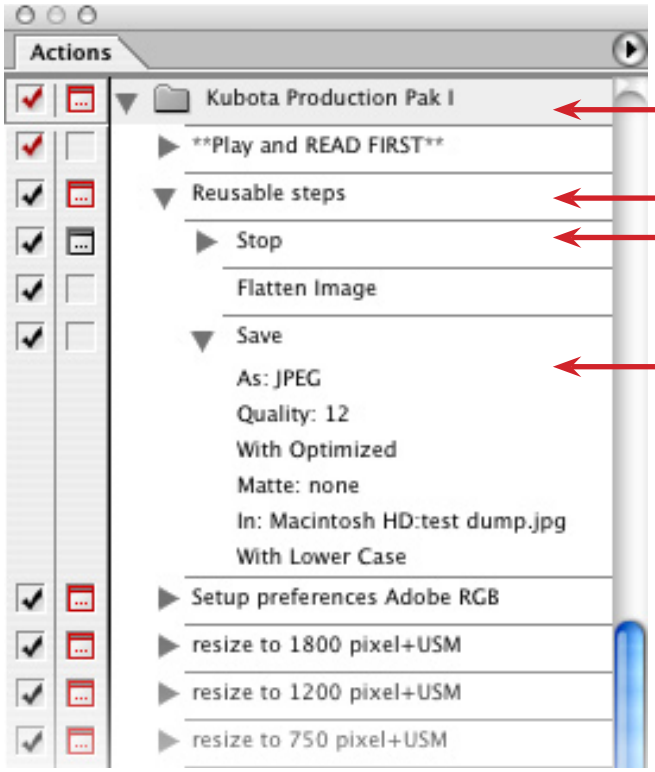
- Location where you saved the Action Pak

Play Actions

Open the image you wish to enhance.

Select one of the Actions
and click Play.

The Actions Palette



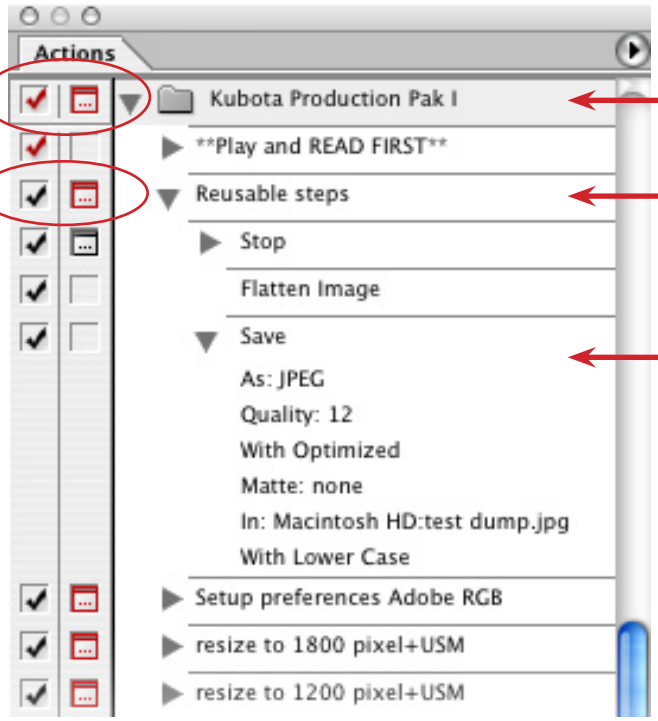
This is the action SET

This is an ACTION

These are the action STEPS
Each action can have numerous steps

These are the step SETTINGS
This is all the information about the settings that were recorded in a step.

Caution! Do not click in either of these columns unless you know what you are doing! If you click a box next to an ACTION or ACTION SET, you could inadvertently turn EVERY step OFF or EVERY dialog OFF. This is NOT undoable or reversible! Some actions need certain steps off and certain ones on. If it happens, you'll need to throw the entire set to the trash and re-load it from the original .atn file. Photoshop® CS2 will display a warning box before you are able to turn this option ON or OFF.



No Touchie!
Only click here, next to an individual STEP, when necessary.

This is the action SET

This is an ACTION

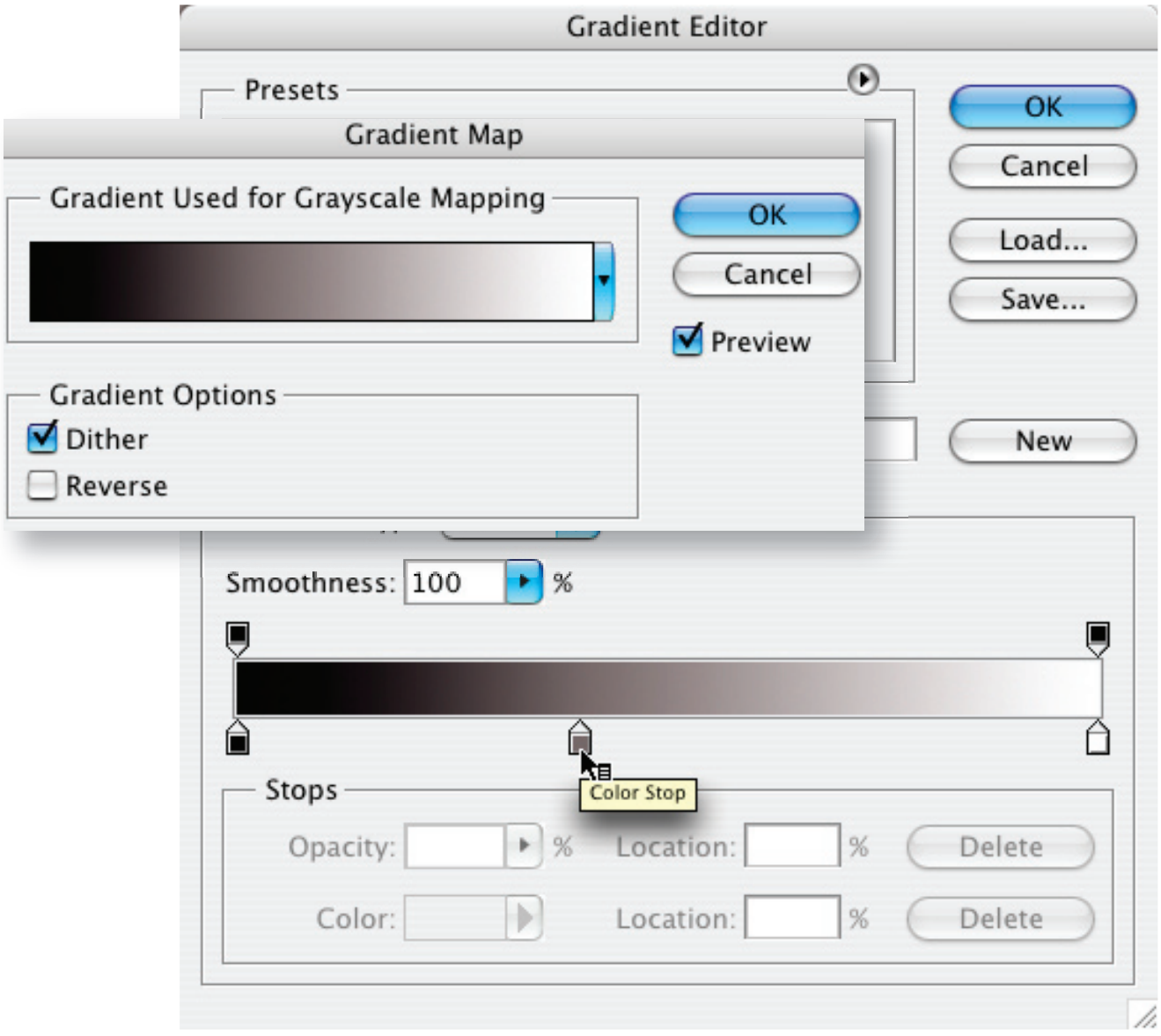
These are the action STEPS
Each action can have numerous steps

Fast. Beautiful. Custom Images.

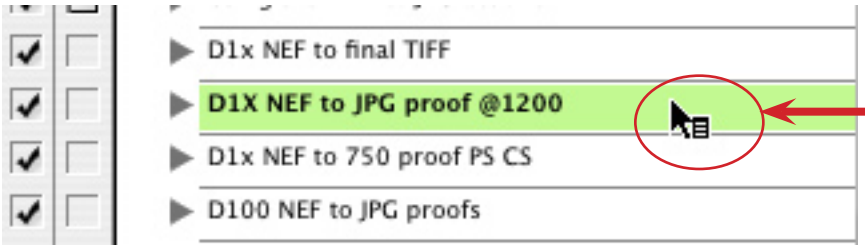
• Some actions have instructions in the form of a separate action in the palette. It is usually placed just before an action that needs some explanation or setup. Before running an action, see if there is a "*Setup" or "*READ" action just before it in the list. If so, run the setup/read action first.

• Many of the actions work great when you combine them. For example, you may run a B&W action that you like, followed by a midtone boost, followed by a Film Grain (from Artistic Tools vol. I), followed by a border and keyline. This is how you can mix-n-match to get a variety of unique custom looks. Take some time to experiment, you'll create your own unique looks with very little effort!

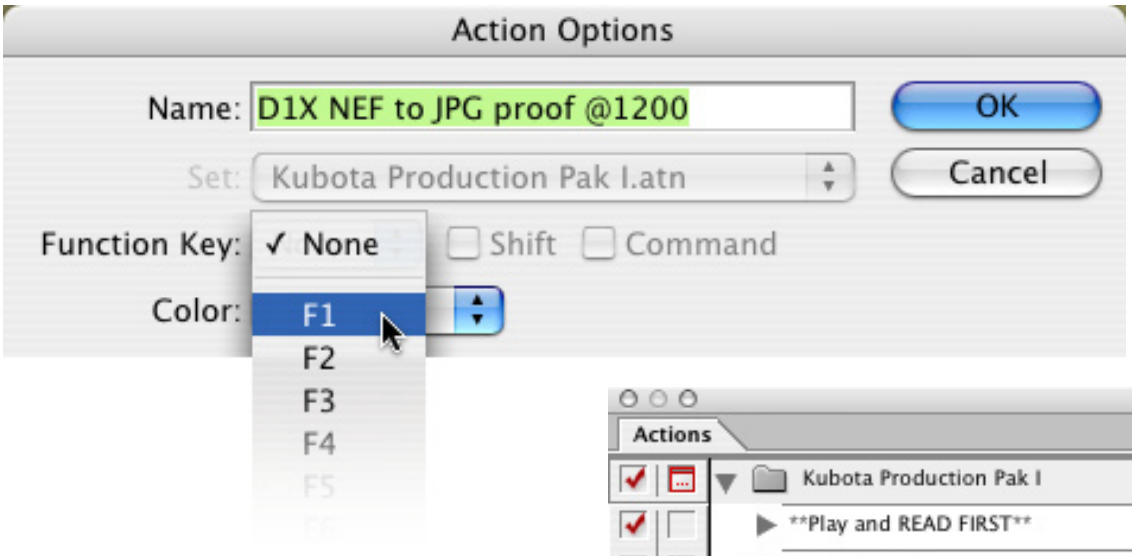
• The base settings in the actions will usually give beautiful results. But, the beauty of it all is that you can tweak the settings to get just the look you want. A good example is the B&W actions. Most of our B&W actions are based on our unique Gradient Map technique. The gradient map adjustment layer can be double-clicked, which will open the settings for editing. Click on the gradient graphic to edit the gradient settings. Try moving the middle color stop left or right to change the middle gray values. Or, double click the middle color stop and give it a hint of warmth. This makes beautiful, rich B&W images or sepia/color tones.

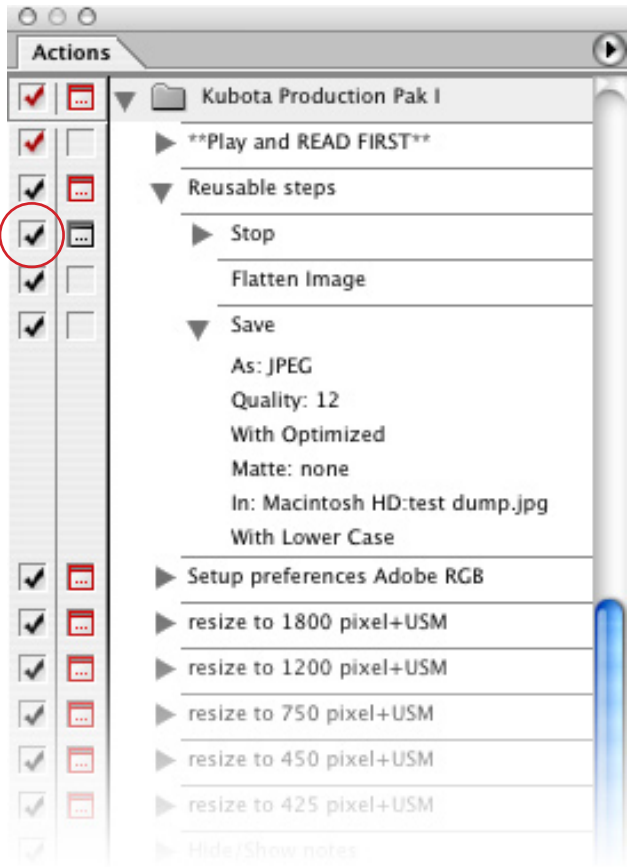


• Don't forget to assign hot keys to your favorite actions! This one step alone can save hours a month (OK, maybe one hour a month, but that's enough for an extra special long lunch!) If you find yourself using a favorite action all the time, double click next to the name of the action and assign it to a function key. We put labels on our keyboard showing what each F key does.



Make sure to double-click to the side of the name, here...

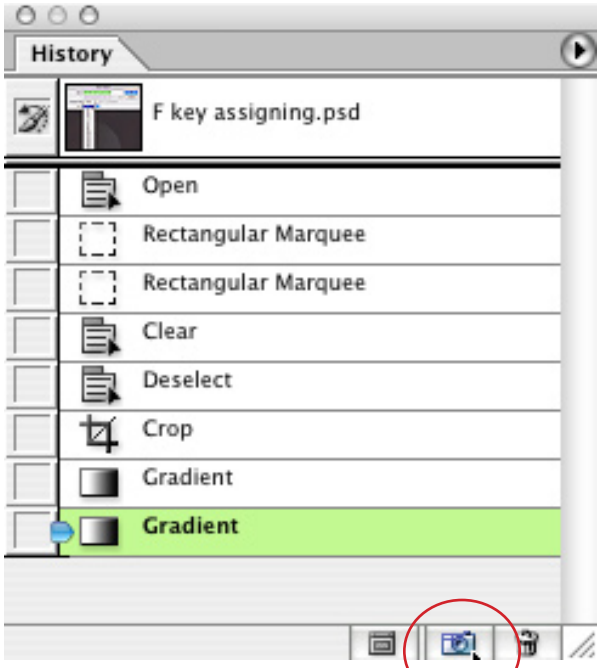


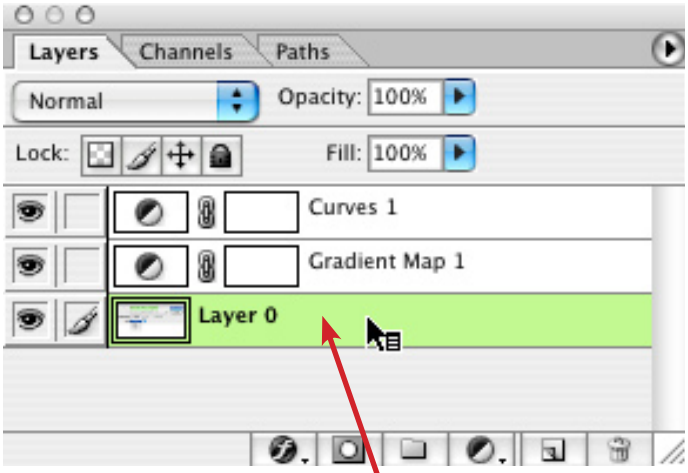


• Many of the actions have steps in them that stop and present a dialog with instructions on its use. After you have used the action a few times, you may not want the instructions to bother you any more. No problemo, you can disable any step by clicking the check box next to its name. BE CAREFUL to only click on the check next to the individual step, not the whole action. You would normally look for the STOP step and turn it off.

• If an action is stopped - because a stop step may ask you to do something before continuing, you can resume where you left off by simply clicking PLAY on the action palette again.

• Some of the actions use complex layering schemes to achieve a result. If your document is already heavily layered. Things could get confusing. It might be a good idea to flatten your image first, before running the action, so the action can't get confused. You can always make a SNAPSHOT of your current image before running the action, so that you can restore it pre-action condition if you don't like the effect. If you don't flatten, at least make sure your main image layer is the ACTIVE layer before running the action. In fact, many of the actions will take a snapshot and flatten the image first for you - saving you the extra steps.





The active image layer

Create a SNAPSHOT of your current document

Actions in detail (some actions work only in CS2 or newer, and are noted as such)

Action: Helpful Information -play me!
Be sure to play this first, it's helpful, like the name says.

Action: 8-16-8
This action will help to minimize or eliminate posterization problems in highly processed images. It's especially useful on JPG images, but also helpful to use on RAW files after they have had actions run on them. The basic concept is that it uses 16 bit mode (much wider color palette) to apply all your adjustments, while keeping the original image and the final image in standard 8 bit mode. Use it as a final step just before sending an image to the lab or your printer. Assign a hot key and use it on everything if you want - it won't hurt, but helps quite often!

Action: Daily Multi-Vitamin
This is a subtle, but effective action for adding "Life" to everyday color images. Especially for digital images, it adds a localized contrast boost, overall color punch, and deepens blue skies. You may want to use it on all your images.

Action: Digital Fill Flash
This is another everyday handy tool. Use it to lighten key areas of your image without washing out the shadows or blowing highlights. Simply run the action, then paint where you need light. Great for bringing attention to faces, lightening shadows on faces, or add depth to otherwise flatly lit images. You'll wonder how you ever lived without it!

Action: Smokeless Burn
The opposite of Digital Fill, Smokeless Burn darkens areas where you paint. Great to add dramatic shadowing to sides of the face, minimizing unimportant details. Burn down edges of the photo to add depth and emphasis to the main subject.

Action: Lord of the Rings EVERYDAY
My Lord of the Rings series of actions is a popular creation that aims to mimic the deep, romantic feel of the movie. It adds color richness, a soft glowing effect, and contrast. This EVERYDAY version is light enough to use, well, everyday. A subtler version of the originals below.

Action: Lord of the Rings II
This is the standard version of the above. A classic, if I do say so myself.

Action: LOTR Return of the King
You want deep, rich, and mysterious? This is the King.

Action: LOTR highlight controller
Helps to reduce highlight burnout in LOTR actions. Although the soft, glowing highlights are part of the effect of the actions, sometimes the highlights might get too hot for your tastes. Use this after running one of the LOTR actions to bring the highlights back down a bit.

Action: Hawaiian Punch 1
Bold, vivid, but no coconuts. This lively action will pop color and add a vivid tropical life to images. Try it on scenic images or environmental portraits.

Action: Radiant People
Based on our Radiance technique, this adds punch but is tuned to reduce over saturation of skin tones.

Action: Radiance Landscape One 2006
One of my favorites for Landscape or fine art images. Color boosting and vividness, without softening or glows.

Action: Radiance Landscape Two 2006
A stronger version of the above.

Action: Paint it! variation 1
Not for the meek (meek computers, that is). This action creates a painterly looking image - automatically. It's different than any of the built in filters in Photoshop because it actually brushes over the entire image, little stroke by stroke, using an artistic brush. It does it all automatically, of course. Because of the complexity, it can take some time to complete, so try it on an image when you have 5-15 minutes to wait.

Action: Add canvas texture to painted
After running the Paint it! action above, try running this action to add a textured "canvas" look to your finished image.

Action: Modern Antique 1
Is it Black & White, or is it Color? It's a soft - lightly colored effect that gives an old, timeless feel to your image.

Action: Modern Antique 1 with glow
Like above, but with a romantic glow. Very old world feeling.

Action: midbright
Open up the midtones of an image without changing shadow or highlight information. Good to reveal mid-shadow detail or soften shadows around a face.

Action: Amazing detail finder (CS2)
When all else fails, this will help to bring apparent sharpness back to your image. Even helps with out of focus images! While nothing can create detail where there is none, this will create a darn good illusion of sharpness. After running the action, you'll need to paint where you want the sharpness to appear. The effect builds up slowly, and can look edgy if taken too far. Paint a few strokes and look at it before painting more. Be sure you've loaded our included custom brushes before running this action.

Action: Amazing detail finder 2 (CS2)
A stronger version of the above.

Action: Smarter Sharp with edge mask 1 (CS2)
Smart Sharp was a nice new tool in CS2, but it was missing one important control - threshold. This would allow you to NOT sharpen areas that shouldn't be sharpened - like skin or smooth skies. By itself, Smart Sharpen works on everything - often enhancing the noise and texture in skin while sharpening details. Not good. Smarter Sharp makes a complex selection for the *edges* of your image first, thus allowing this cool sharpening tool to avoid enhancing noise and skin texture.

Action: Smoothner (CS2)
Reduces noise and grain in an image. Smooths things out subtly overall.

Action: Makeup Artist (CS2)
Works only on skin tones. Creates a smooth, porcelain like skin texture.

Action: Angel Glow
Ahh, the heavenly light. Glows the highlights only to create an ethereal feel. Beautiful on brightly lit sunny days with lots of specular highlights.

Action: Mid Puller
Similar to mid bright, but slightly different. This one has a smoother tone transition from shadow to mids to highlight. It's hard to explain, so just try it!

Action: StarBurst vignette
This might sound cheesy, but really it's not. Sometimes you want the look of darkened edges via vignette, but don't want a predictable even circle shape. This creates a harder to detect star shape around the subject before darkening the edges. You can't see the star shape in the final effect, but it's more natural looking than a circular vignette.

Action: Edge burner
Darkens just the edges evenly around the frame of the picture.

Action: Edge Blur
A cool effect with a gradual motion-like blur around the subject. It gently fades from clear at the subject center to blurred at the edges.

Action: Edge Blur More
A stronger version of the above.

Action: ToneTime - Blue 1
Cool blue monochromatic toning

Action: ToneTime - Blue 2
A more saturated blue toning.

Action: ToneTime - Red 1
You guessed it, red toning.

Action: ToneTime - Red 2
More red.

Action: ToneTime - Green 1
Green with envy?

Action: ToneTime - Green 2
The color of money. Hey, what about doing a cool 4-up panel with each of the color tones - sorta Warhol-esque.

Action: Split Tone Warm & Blue
Classic split toning with warm in the shadows and cool blue in the highlights.

Action: Split Tone Blue & Warm
The opposite of the above - with blue in the shadows and warm in the highlights.

Action: Deep Blues
Rich blue toning - but in the shadows primarily. A very rich look.

Action: Deep Red
Red in the shadows only.

Action: Deep Green
Green in the shadows.

Action: Deep Purple
Ahh, classic rock.

Action: Select-A-Toner
Overall monochromatic toning where you select any color you want on the fly.

Action: Shadow Select-A-Toner subtle
Similar to above, but applies tone to the shadows primarily.

Action: Shadow Select-A-Toner heavier
More colorful version of above.

Action: Hot Fudge 1
Yum. I love this. Nearly black and white, but with a richness that can only be compared to hot fudge.

Action: Hot Fudgier
When you really need a sugar fix. Warmer, fudgier.

Action: Hot Fudge with a Cherry
Not for the faint at heart, or those on a diet. This is similar to modern antique, but combines warm fudge tones with some enhanced color from the original color image.

Action: Mocha B&W
Very close to true B&W, but with deep rich shadows. Not noticeably brown, just rich.

Action: the NEW B&W
The closest thing to straight B&W you'll find here. For those who want more of a traditional B&W look.

Action: the NEW B&W midbright
Same as above, but with lightening in the midtones. Helps to brighten skin.

Action: 4x6 with white borders
Great for those who print proofs. Creates a 4x6 image at 300 dpi with a white border all around. Keep in mind that a full-frame 35mm proportioned image can't be framed in a 4x6 with even borders - and no cropping. So, the border is heavier on the short ends. If you want even borders all around, use the EVEN noted actions below.

Action: 4x6 with black borders
Same, but with a black border.

Action: 4x6 with white borders & black keyline
White borders and a thin black keyline around the image area.

Action: 4x6 with black borders & white keyline
Black borders and a thin white keyline around the image area.

Action: 4x6 with EVEN white borders
Even borders all around. Note, however, that some cropping of the image on the long side is necessary to create even borders. It will crop automatically.

Action: 4x6 with EVEN black borders
Same as above with black borders.

Action: 4x6 with EVEN black borders & black keyline (CS2)
Self-explanatory, don't ya think?

Action: 4x6 with EVEN black borders & white keyline (CS2)
More.

Action: Make a flattened copy layer
This is great to use when you have several layers already and want to try an action on a composite of all the layers - as if it were flattened - but you don't want to flatten it yet. Creates a copy of your entire layered file on a new single layer above all the others.

Action: Sloppy border proofs instructions-play first!!
Yes, by popular demand I've added automatic sloppy border proofing. Please play this action first to see instructions on how to setup and use the sloppy border action. Follow them carefully, or it won't work! Once you've done it a few times, however, it's easy to setup.

Action: *Rotation Script setup location
This action only needs to be run once! It is necessary to tell your system where the "rotate tall to wide.jsx" script is located. Once you've done this, the sloppy border action can be run without having to set it up again.

Action: 1-Open 4x6 sloppy template
After the setup is done, this is the first step to starting the batch of sloppy border processing. It will allow you to open your preferred sloppy border template and copy it to memory for the next action to run properly. Do not do anything else between this action and the next.

Action: 2-Batch Sloppy 4x6 proofs
This will get the action going. Follow the steps carefully. You'll need to know what color space your images that you want to add the sloppy borders to are in. e.g. sRGB or Adobe RGB. You'll then be asked for a source folder of the normal images, and a destination folder for the finished proofs with the sloppy borders.

Action: *Make 4x6 proofs with Sloppy
This is used by the action above, and is not intended to be run alone.

Have fun! And don't forget that you can create limitless unique looks by sequencing actions into your own favorite combinations. Also, take some time to look at the layers that our actions create and see how we do them - it's a great way to learn to create your own actions and looks. We're not keeping any secrets from you!

You can download a free E-book PDF file from our website that shows many before and after images using these actions. It also shows some combinations of actions that create cool new looks.

Download from our support forum: http://www.KubotaImageTools.com. Click on the "Tips & Tricks" link, then go to the section for the Action Paks.

We'll also be releasing additional sloppy border file Paks that will work with our actions so you can vary the look of your sloppies. Keep an eye on our forum for more information.

If you would like more information on other training products:
The Digital RAW Workflow for Photoshop® CS2, The Digital PhotoFlow,
AutoAlbum, Mini-Tutorials, more Actions, or live workshops, please visit our website:

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